Towards a New Manifesto: Innovation, Sustainability and Development in Argentina

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- Secretaria de Planeamiento y Políticas
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Report:

The general goal of the workshop was to present a general panorama of science and technology for development in Argentina through the participation of heterogeneous actors such as policy makers, scholars, social movements and labor unions. Furthermore, we aim at discussing how to enlarge and improve interactions between S&T sector and the civil society. The debate was divided in three tables and we reached the following conclusions:

Round Table 1: Social Usefulness of Public Knowledge

Our goal was to discuss how the science and technology (S&T) sector could identify and respond to the technological needs of those who do not exert commercial demand (e.g. poor people).

It was generally agreed that marginalized groups hardly ever turn to S&T institutes spontaneously. Politicians, who may have better knowledge about their needs than S&T researchers, rarely make explicit demands on the S&T sector. Finally, S&T institutes have their own priorities which very rarely match to those of the marginalized groups.
Therefore, interactions between S&T institutes and marginalized groups are usually sporadic, isolated and rely on the personal commitment of researchers or individuals within social movements or other groups in the civil society.

- Some steps were mentioned in order to widen and tighten sustainable linkages between the S&T sector and marginalized groups in the civil society:
- S&T institutes must go through an internal discussion on what values they would follow and defend. This discussion should be articulated throughout the S&T system.
- The different functions of S&T institutes (teaching, research, out-reach activities, technology transfer, etc.) should be articulated
- Researchers should de-construct and co-construct (with social actors) their modes of knowledge creation in order to improve the social value of their activities. Users should play a role on the construction of scientific knowledge.
- The academic evaluation schemes should be widen to include interaction activities.
- Knowledge from marginalized social actors should be recovered. Although special attention should be paid about who appropriates this knowledge.

Round Table 2: Technologies for Social Inclusion

The aim of this table was to debate common problems faced by NGOs, R&D institutions and social groups when designing and implementing technologies for social inclusion.

Characteristics of the problem: The S&T system in Argentina has several to conceive and resolve issues of social inclusion. There a number of ongoing R&D programs focused on solving mostly punctual and local problems, but its scale and scope is fragmentary and insufficient . Sometimes, the development of some technology for social inclusion is successful at local level and in the short term, but a number of setbacks can arose when trying to scaling up this experiences. Furthermore, institutional learning's from these experiences is scattered and the gained skills are lost once the experiences are interrupted. Ultimately, relevant actors do not recognize that they belong to a common of technologies social inclusion.

Some suggestions were made in order strengthen the field of technologies for social inclusion:
- In order to tackle scaling-up, problems, to establish links new technologies and to include new kind of knowledge and heterogeneous actors, there is a need to

improve the conceptual framework available on intermediate and appropriate technologies.

- In order boost new S&T policy agenda, the self-identification of actors and social movements with the task of building up and implementing technological solutions for social problems should be promoted.
- Changing the focus of the debate. Instead of devising technological solution for specific problems, it is necessary to propose socio-technical solutions which reach the whole society
- To develop new and wider communication strategies in order to promote technologies for social inclusion. For example: to use communication tools developed by the green movement

Round Table 3 - The Environment and Social Inclusion

In Argentina, main environmental problems are clustered around two major issues: i) those derived from industrialization and urbanization (lack of sewages and fresh water, of rivers and lakes; air pollution); ii) those derived from the fast expansion of the "frontier of production" (agriculturization, mineral and oil extraction, which in turn intensify rural exodus).

There is agreement on the diagnosis of the global situation as it's presented in draft paper of the Steps Manifesto: increasing innovation could turn in increasing poverty and inequality. The question is which how innovation policies could help to solve these problems. We think the paper falls short of acknowledging that poverty today is more a matter of distribution than of production. It also lacks a clear, political definition of innovation, as well as of diversity. It also exhibits a certain Eurocentrism, as it lacks a deeper discussion on native science.

Particularly regarding the environment, the paper assumes that the negative consequences of technology can be solved with more technology —although this is still a matter of debate. Another assumption has to do with the status of winners and losers following the adoption of new technologies: empirical evidence suggests that such a dichotomy is not realistic —risks and benefits many times come together. We would also like to point at the paper's naiveté in describing national governments, multilateral institutions and the industry as confused actors that can be enlightened. This is related to another important shortcoming: the paper hardly takes notice of power relations between countries, direct or mediated by multilateral institutions.

Regarding solutions, we propose:
- Students and scholars could act as "bridges," mediating between actors involved in innovation's policy making and the society at large
- There is a need to take account of the voices of those whose needs are not served by the market, and in conjunction with civil society.
- Professionalization of these mediators is desirable.
- We also recommend the discussion and construction of long-term national agendas on science, technology and innovation, articulated with regional agendas.